

# **Planning Collaboration Initiative Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration**

## **Conference Call Summary for April 10, 2003**

### **Topic: Timeliness and Consistency**

The first round of conference calls for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Planning Collaboration Initiative (PCI) continued on April 10, 2003 with a discussion of Timeliness and Consistency. This was the eighth of eight conference calls to discuss the drafting of a National Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between FHWA and FTA. Jeff Bryan of the Volpe Center facilitated the discussion. PCI members who participated in the conference call included: Robin Mayhew and David Kuehn of FHWA Headquarters, Vince Valdes of FTA Headquarters, and Pete Butler of FTA Region 1. Other participants from FHWA Headquarters included Robin Smith, and Eloise Powell; and, from FTA Headquarters were Terry Rosapep and Paul Verchinski. Volpe Center staff participation included Cassandra Allwell, Kate Fichter, and Esther Lee.

Representatives from the following field offices participated in this fifth call:

- FTA Region 1
- FTA Region 4
- FTA Region 7
- FTA Region 8
- FTA Region 9
- FTA Region 10
- FHWA California Division
- FHWA Florida Division
- FHWA Kansas Division
- FHWA Michigan Division
- FHWA Minnesota Division
- FHWA Utah Division
- FHWA Texas Division

This summary provides (1) responses to questions raised about timeliness and consistency in planning products and services delivery and (2) suggestions for Headquarters that may not necessarily be included in the National MOU (*see Parking Lot/Bus Stop Issues*).

### **DISCUSSION OF TIMELINESS AND CONSISTENCY**

The conference call participants discussed timeliness and consistency in jointly delivering transportation planning products and services. Participants responded to the following three questions that were raised by the facilitator:

- A. What are the ways to measure the various aspects of performance, particularly timeliness and consistency?
- B. How would FHWA and FTA hold themselves accountable to meet these performance measures?
- C. How would the participants want the performance measures to be included in the National MOU?

#### A. Performance Measures – Timeliness and Consistency

Participants discussed the timeliness and consistency of delivering planning products and services. While a few products were mentioned (e.g. Planning Findings and Certification Reviews), the discussion focused generally on working relationships and customer service. Several participants discussed whether it was necessary to deliver consistent products and services across the nation. One participant asked, “if planning could ever not be context-specific – do national standards make sense?” Planning may not be a cookie-cutter process, although states and Mops should be able to expect equal service from different offices of the same Administration.

Examples of the variety of practices used to deal with timeliness include:

1. In Utah, FHWA and FTA agree to a timeline of dates for completing projects.
2. Region 1 uses a timeline similar to Utah, but also includes resource agencies (e.g. EPA).
3. Region 7 follows general timelines that were established years ago, and are tailored for each state.

Participants agreed that there should be consistency in the length and depth of the planning reports and documents (e.g. Certification Reviews and Planning Findings). They provided the following recommendations:

- Headquarters should issue easy-to-use templates.
- Field offices should set performance measures for themselves and their partners.

#### B. Accountability and Implementation

There was little discussion about how field offices would be held accountable for meeting timelines and ensuring consistency in planning products and services. One participant did recommend that if deadlines are routinely not met, the field office should be required to evaluate its working arrangements both internal and external. Some participants did voice that the National MOU should provide structure and expectations.

#### C. Considerations for Draft MOU

Throughout the discussion, participants responded to the question of “How would the participants want the performance measures to be included in the National MOU?” Participants made the following recommendations:

- Establish broad timelines, but allow for variations that allow field offices to be responsive to customer needs.
- Acknowledge that some issues may arise that will extend beyond the time limits set by National MOU.
- Keep provisions for exceptions, but not so many that timelines become useless.
- Need systematic timelines to identify problems.
- Headquarters should provide oversight and stewardship to address identified problems with timeliness and consistency (e.g. training and extra support).
- Generally address expectations for performance; in a parallel document (not part of National MOU) detail the nuts and bolts of how to conduct an evaluation.

## **PARKING LOT/BUS STOP ISSUES**

Participants made the following two recommendations to FHWA and FTA Headquarters:

- Train all field planners about the requirements of the planning products and services.
- Include questions on the “national survey” regarding timeliness and consistency in order for the Administrations to better understand what problems exist.